

## Make a Change

By Elizabeth Sollis, Executive Director's Office  
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Danny Trejo is most well known for the “bad guys” he portrays in the films (180+) he has acted in over the past 25 years. In real life, Trejo actually struggled with drug addiction and, as a result, was in and out of correctional facilities during his late teens and mid-twenties. While imprisoned, Trejo completed a 12-step rehabilitation program and has been sharing his recovery, successes and wisdom with youth and adults in custody ever since. In Utah for the 2010 Sundance Film Festival, Trejo graciously agreed to share his story with the youth at Decker Lake Youth Center on January 25.

Growing up in a family where alcohol was a part of every gathering, Trejo is very familiar with the impact of alcohol abuse. “My dad and most of the men in my family were drunk all of the time,” Trejo told youth. “Alcohol has always been a part of our lives.” At the age of ten, Trejo experimented with drugs with one of his uncles and within four years he was smoking rock (cocaine). Trejo’s first involvement with juvenile corrections occurred when he was 11 years old. In 1968, Trejo decided he needed to make a change. “I realized I will spend the rest of my life in and out of prison unless there’s a change,” said Trejo. “Alcohol became a way of life in my family and, for me, one (drink) is too many and a million is not enough.”

After being released from prison in 1969, Trejo “got clean and decided to dedicate my life to help someone else. My life has gotten better and better. More I do, more I get back.” Trejo is the father of three adult children, who have “never seen me drunk or loaded.” The advice he repeatedly gave youth was “Make a change.” He suggested the first immediate change anyone in jail or juvenile institutions should make is to take alcohol and drugs out of their lives. “If we do that, that’s a big change. Alcohol and drugs are always at the root of a bad situation.” Trejo emphasized the importance of an education and obtaining a high school diploma, sharing

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stories about the teachers who have impacted his life for the best. "This place is break for you," Trejo told youth, "What you do with it is completely up to you. Minds are trained to say 'I can't do that.' Retrain them to say 'I can do anything I want.'" Trejo advised youth, "Find something you enjoy doing and figure out a way to get paid for it. I promise good things will come to pass as long as it's not illegal."

Trejo closed with thanks to the youth, "I do this (talking with youth) because I'm selfish. You guys helped me have this beautiful day. Thank you so, so much."

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